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ABSTRACT

Recent work in person memory combines cognitive models of memory with theories of social cognition. To examine the accuracy of person perception, 66 college students (24 males, 42 females) were administered a programmed case using 21 episodes. After 15 minutes of filler tasks, subjects were allowed free recall for 30 minutes, followed by impression formation and attribution tasks. Data on memory organization were categorized by interepisodic, temporal episodic, semantic episodic, and local and distant semantic organizations. Subjects were ordered by accuracy scores and divided into good, average, and poor groups. An analysis of the results showed that good, average, and poor judges did not differ in the total number of correct ideas recalled from the life history, nor in the number of ideas recalled per episode. However, good judges showed significantly more distant semantic organization than average or poor judges. All groups retrieved about one third of those episodes missed by the temporal search. All groups used a predominantly temporal search strategy. These findings suggest that models of person perception and memory may have to be expanded to explain why distant association of episodes is related to accuracy in prediction. (BL)

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Person Memory in Good Intuitive Judges of Personality

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Person Memory in Good Intuitive Judges of Personality

Recent work in person memory combines cognitive models of memory with theories of social cognition (Hastie, et al., 1980). One main line of investigation examines how forming an impression of personality from behavioral episodes affects memory for those data. The purpose one has in mind while considering behavioral episodes - whether to form an impression or to recall as much as possible - is related to the organization of the data, which is reflected, in turn, in the accuracy of recall (Ebbesen, 1980; Hamilton, et al., 1980; Jeffery & Mischel, 1980). We wanted to extend this work by including a classic topic in social cognition: accuracy of person perception.

We identified good intuitive judges of personality through the 'programmed case'. In this task, an actual life history is cast into a series of episodes, each of which has several alternative endings. Judges must choose the correct one, based on their knowledge of the case to that point. (Their knowledge base increases as they receive feedback on the correct alternatives after each episode.) This measure reccommends itself because it requires the use of episodes comparable to that in other person memory studies and because the task of making predictions has been shown to be similar to that of forming impressions in its effects on memory organization and accuracy (Jeffery & Mischel, 1980).

Following Dailey's (1971) analysis of the reasoning used by judges in the programmed case, we assumed that good judges would use more cues from past episodes to predict the resolutions of current episodes, and consequently, they would have a more richly connected semantic network of associations among the episodes - particularly among episodes which were physically distant from one another, as Dailey noted in his sample.

At first one might think the superior organization of the good judges ought to result in more accurate recall of the episodes, but this hypothesis would be too simple. In fact, Klemp (1975) found that recall of specific facts from a programmed case was unrelated to accuracy of prediction. The problem is that recall of good judges will be better than that of poor judges only to the extent that a rich semantic inter-episodic network adds efficiency to the organization, but there are other powerful organizing factors for the facts of the life history. First, within episodes, ideas are organized by narrative principles. Next, inter-episodic organization is not only semantic, since the case is essentially a list of temporally ordered episodes. In our pilot work we saw this reflected in the retrieval process, which consisted of starting at the first episode, recalling its details, then moving to the next, and the next, etc. Only if some episodes are missed by this temporal search strategy will semantic connections be a relevant consideration. So, our hypothesis was that accuracy of prediction ought to be reflected in person memory in so far as it is sensitive to inter-episodic semantic organization.

Method

The subjects were 66 undergraduates (24 men and 42 women) who participated for course credit.

After obtaining informed consent, a programmed case using 21 episodes devised by Klemp (1975) was administered. After 15 minutes of filler tasks, free recall was allowed for one half hour, followed by impression formation and attribution tasks (not reported here) and debriefing.

Recall was measured by comparing each recalled idea to a list of all simple clauses in the case. Aggreement was scored if the idea matched the gist of the original. (Two coders were able to code this and other memory variables with reliabilities greater than .85.) An episode was recalled if at least one idea from that episode was recalled.

Interepisodic organization was measured as follows: The episodes were numbered 1 - 21 by their order in the case. The recalled episodes were listed in the order that each subject remembered them (e.g., 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 17, ...). Starting with the initial recalled episode, each was indexed for the distance or association to the next one by counting the number of steps to that unit. For the case of (1, 2) above, the number of steps is one, i.e., unit n is linked to $n+1$. For (5, 10), the distance is five steps, and so on.

Temporal episodic organization was measured by the proportion of episodes connected by links of $n+1$, 2, & 3.

Semantic episodic organization connects relatively remote episodes, i.e., associations to episodes $n + 4$ or greater.

Semantic organization was divided into 'local' or 'distant' to compare possible long and short term memory differences for the list of episodes. Assuming short term memory has a capacity of 7+ or - 2 units, we took nine episodes to be the limit of local semantic organization (or, n less than or equal to +8). Associations of $n + 9$ or greater were assumed to be mediated by long term memory.

Local and distant semantic organization were measured as proportions of those episodes which had not been recalled by a temporal search strategy, an index of the efficiency of semantic organization in recovering what was missed by the dominant hueristic.

Subjects were ordered by accuracy scores and divided into good, average, and poor groups. Analyses were conducted by one-way ANOVA's, after arcsine transformation of the proportions (Cohen & Cohen, 1975).

Results

The results are described in Table 1. The good, average, and poor judges (whose predictive accuracy scores are given in Table 1) did not differ in the total of correct ideas recalled from the life history, nor in the numter of ideas recalled per episode. The number of episodes recalled was marginally significant, $F(2,63) = 3.015$, $p = .057$.

As expected, good judges showed significantly more distant semantic organization than average or poor judges, $F(2,63) = 5.478$, $p = .007$ (good judges were higher than average judges, $p = .01$, and higher than poor judges, $p = .05$, using the Duncan range test).

However, the groups did not differ in local semantic organization - that is, all groups retrieved about a third of those episodes missed by the temporal search. All groups used a predominantly temporal search strategy.

Discussion

As expected, accuracy in person perception did have an effect on the semantic organization of person memory. This was apparent only if dominant organizing factors (intraepisodic principles and temporal ordering of the list of episodes) were separated out - in this case by distinguishing retrieval strategies.

The finding that good judges showed more distant associations of episodes fit Dailey's (1971) data from superior predictors, but the lack of effect for local associations was surprising. We suspect this indicates that good judges resort to episodes stored in long term memory in the search for predictive cues.

These findings have three implications for person memory: There are individual differences in person memory due to accuracy of social cognition. The variety of organizational factors in free recall of episodic data should be recognized and used in measurement. Models of person perception and memory may have to be expanded to explain why distant association of episodes is related to accuracy in prediction.

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Table 1. Person Memory of Intuitive Judges of Personality

	Poor		Average		Good	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Accuracy	.64	.07	.82	.05	1.128	.17
Correct ideas recalled	75.41	26.72	79.96	27.20	82.64	22.39
Episodes recalled	14.45	3.17	14.77	3.41	16.59	2.46
Ideas per episode	5.21	1.44	5.42	1.52	5.04	1.39
Organization						
Temporal	.75	.14	.78	.16	.68	.18
Semantic						
Local	.30	.18	.30	.20	.36	.15
Distant	.13	.22	.08	.16	.31	.31

Note: For each category of judges, $n = 22$.